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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 001856

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [IN](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: INDO-BANGLADESH BORDER INCIDENT

Classified By: P/E Counselor D.C. McCullough, reasons 1.4(b),(d)

1. (SBU) On April 16, an exchange of gunfire between the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and the Indian Border Security Forces (BSF) on the northeastern border at Akhaura killed one BSF officer and at least three Bangladeshis, according to media and other reports. The incident occurred as the BSF Director General was in Dhaka meeting with his BDR counterpart in an effort to reduce border incidents. Since the incident, trade traffic has reportedly fallen at Bangladesh's 12 land ports and stopped completely at Benapole and Akhaura.

2. (SBU) On April 17, the Indian High Commission in Dhaka issued a press release that described the death of the BSF officer as "pre-planned and pre-meditated." The officer and a BSF constable, it said, were "dragged inside Bangladesh territory and attacked by the BDR." The officer's body bore "marks of bullet injury fired from point blank range and injuries from sharp cutting weapons." The constable was reportedly found inside Bangladesh with "serious multiple injuries."

3. (SBU) On April 20, local media featured MEA's warning that the incident's "repercussions could not be ignored." Some accounts claimed the border tension is "unprecedented," and that post-incident conversations between senior BDG-GOI officials have had little impact.

4. (SBU) On March 13, prominent human rights NGO Odhikar released a report claiming that the BSF and "Indian miscreants" have killed 377 Bangladeshis over the past five years along the 2600-mile Indo-Bangladeshi border.

5. (C) Comment: Given the charge that the BDR essentially kidnapped, tortured, and executed the BSF officer, this may be the most serious border incident since the April 18-19, 2001, battle that killed, according to the BDG, 65 BSF soldiers and three BDR soldiers after the BSF allegedly tried to establish a post on Bangladeshi territory. Relations were already strained following India's nixing of the SAARC summit in February and a series of provocative statements by both sides. At an April 21 private luncheon, Ambassador will urge Foreign Policy Adviser Rahman and State Home Minister Babar to exercise restraint. We hope Embassy New Delhi will have an opportunity to urge similar restraint on the GOI.

THOMAS